

CURRENT STATE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN LIBERAL ADULT EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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SUMMARY

Sustainable development is an essential part of the core of Finnish liberal adult education. The purpose of liberal adult education is to support the multifaceted development of individuals' personalities and their ability to function in communities and to promote democracy, equality and pluralism in Finnish society. Sustainable development is included in the Act on Liberal Adult Education, which states that one of the aims of the education provided by liberal adult education institutions is to promote the implementation of sustainable development.

This review of the current state of sustainable development in liberal adult education institutions was commissioned by the Finnish National Agency for Education at the request of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The review is based on a survey carried out in spring 2025, which received responses from 263 liberal adult education institutions. These represent almost 92% (91.6%) of all liberal adult education institutions in Finland. In the survey, respondents were asked how the different aspects of sustainable development are realised in the operations of educational institutions and how well it is integrated into teaching and practice. The survey also asked about the impact of changes in the operating environment on operations and identified development needs.

Liberal adult education institutions are, for the most part, motivated to promote sustainable development and contribute to its implementation. However, respondents are concerned about planned and systematic implementation, as they fear that it will significantly increase workloads. To alleviate this, institutions are in need of concrete, easy-to-apply guidelines for planning and implementing sustainable development. They also want clear methods for monitoring and evaluating sustainable development. The operators of educational institutions play a key role in reinforcing the importance of sustainable development in the institutions' strategies and ensuring sufficient resources not only for implementation, but also for monitoring.

In many liberal adult education institutions, sustainable development is seen as a self-evident value and measures to be implemented. However, students or partners are not always aware of it. Explaining and communicating about values and practices strengthens the identity of and adds value to the institution. They can also improve the institution's standing in communities, improve efficiency and even provide significant cost savings.

Some liberal education institutions have been significantly affected by recent funding cuts. The survey also asked about institutions' views on sustainability from the perspective of sales, economic value, competitiveness and audience growth. The respondents did not view these as significant aspects of economic sustainability. However, by adding a sustainable development dimension to them, such as sustainable consumption and recycling, risk management and innovation, institutions can improve both their own financial sustainability and support students' ability to act more sustainably.

The survey responses provide a somewhat narrow view of environmental sustainability. Almost all of the institutions mention waste recycling as one of their concrete measures, but environmental sustainability is also much more than that. Strengthening the environmental dimension as part of a holistic and measurable plan supports institutions' efforts to adapt to climate change. Liberal adult education institutions reach a wide range of population groups and have the potential to extensively influence efforts to increase nature and carbon handprints through learning.

While many liberal adult education institutions already engage in close cooperation with each other and other actors, the survey also shows that there is still plenty of room for improvement. Expanding cooperation with other actors in society can generate new innovations, improve efficiency, support local development and help achieve greater impact. The survey respondents want the whole sector to work together to advocate for liberal adult education.

Liberal adult education institutions would like the government to increasingly steer them to pursue sustainable development goals and cooperation through funding and project work. The survey respondents would like additional funding for all types of institutions to implement projects, support cooperation, develop sustainable development approaches and strengthen personnel competence.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1987, the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development defined sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The Commission published a report entitled ‘Our Common Future’, which put sustainable development on the international agenda and laid the groundwork for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by the UN in 2015. Finland is contributing to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda through public sector, private sector and civil society actors.

Sustainable development is an essential part of the core of Finnish liberal adult education. The purpose of liberal adult education is to support the multifaceted development of individuals’ personalities and their ability to function in communities and to promote democracy, equality and pluralism in Finnish society. Sustainable development is included in the Act on Liberal Adult Education, which states that one of the aims of the education provided by liberal adult education institutions is to promote the implementation of sustainable development.

In order to get a situational picture of the current efforts of liberal adult education institutions to promote sustainable development, the Finnish National Agency for Education, at the request of the Ministry of Education and Culture, commissioned a review of the current state of sustainable development in liberal adult education institutions. This report is based on a survey conducted as part of the review in spring 2025. The practical work on the review was carried out by Finnsus Oy.

The report examines how the different aspects of sustainable development are realised in the operations of liberal adult education institutions and how well it is integrated into teaching and practice. The survey also asked about the impact of changes in the operating environment on operations and identified development needs.

1.1 Liberal adult education

Liberal adult education is a form of education within the Finnish education system that is regulated by the Act on Liberal Adult Education (632/1998). The purpose of liberal adult education is to organise education based on the principle of lifelong learning that supports societal integrity, equality and active citizenship (632/1998, section 1(1)). Its aim is the all-round development of people without formal qualification requirements, with a particular focus on strengthening the education and competence of adults, but also of young people and children (632/1998, section 1(2)).

Liberal adult education institutions include adult education centres (Finnish ‘kansalaisopisto’), folk high schools (‘kansanopisto’), summer universities (‘kesäyliopisto’), sports institutes (‘liikunnan koulutuskeskus/urheiluopisto’) and study centres (‘opintokeskus’), each of which have their own educational mission as defined by law. The organisation of liberal adult education is based on an authorisation to provide education issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Throughout Finland, liberal adult education institutions implement lifelong learning and education that strengthens people’s competence and civic skills, increases wellbeing and strengthens communities. This work is an important part of the implementation of sustainable development in Finland. The services of liberal adult education institutions are used by people of all ages, from children to

seniors. In 2021, liberal adult education reached approximately 700,000 people (approximately 15% of the adult population) and provided more than 80,000 courses across Finland (www.vipunen.fi, 2021). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is reflected in the figures, which are lower than in previous years.

An essential aspect of liberal adult education is the fact that it is voluntary and open to all. Liberal adult education is not qualification-oriented, and liberal education institutions are primarily responsible for their own education and the development thereof. The education offered is based on local, regional or national education needs, ranges from year-long study programmes to short courses of a few hours and covers subjects from culture, the arts, physical education and languages to digital literacy and social issues. Liberal adult education institutions also provide basic education in the arts and open higher education studies. As central government funding generally covers only part of the cost of their education provision, the law allows liberal adult education institutions to charge reasonable fees for their education from students.

Liberal adult education institutions

Adult education centres (kansalaisopisto)

Adult education centres are educational institutions that offer opportunities for voluntary learning and the development of civic skills based on local and regional educational needs. They most commonly offer courses in arts, crafts and music, language and literature, home economics, physical education, ICT and social studies.

Folk high schools (kansanopisto)

Folk high schools are boarding schools that provide voluntary full-time education to young people and adults, promote students' study skills and educate them as individuals and members of society. Since the extension of compulsory education implemented in Finland in 2021, folk high schools have also offered liberal adult education courses aimed at allowing students to continue their compulsory education after primary and lower secondary education.

Summer universities (kesäyliopisto)

Summer universities are regional educational institutions that focus on providing open higher education studies and responding to the other skills and educational needs of their respective regions, also taking into account the highly educated population.

Sports institutes (liikunnan koulutuskeskus)

Sports institutes are national boarding schools or regional educational institutions providing full-time education and training. They are tasked with organising education and training that promotes sports activities, wellbeing and health for the whole population as well as education, training and coaching activities for sports organisations and clubs.

Study centres (opintokeskus)

Study centres are national educational institutions that organise studies themselves and in cooperation with civil and cultural organisations to promote lifelong learning, wellbeing and active citizenship and the functioning of democracy and civil society.

Central organisations for liberal adult education

The central organisations for liberal adult education are Kansalaisopistojen liitto ry, Suomen Kansanopistoyhdistys ry, Suomen kesäyliopistot ry, Urheiluopistot ry, Opintokeskukset ry and Bildningsalliansen r.f. Bildningsalliansen r.f. is the central organisation for Swedish-language liberal adult education institutions, regardless of the type of institution, while the others are central organisations for each type of institution. Each plays an important role in supporting the development, advocacy and lobbying of its members.

Together, the central organisations form the cooperative organisation Vapaa Sivistystyö ry (VST ry) – Fritt Bildningsarbete r.f., which is the cooperative organisation of liberal adult education institutions and their national central organisations.

VST ry focuses on the joint advocacy and lobbying of liberal adult education. The lobbying focuses on the status and operational resources of liberal adult education in the Finnish education and learning system. In addition to this, VST ry coordinates the cooperation programme for research in liberal adult education SVV – Freedom and Responsibility of Liberal Adult Education.

In the survey, both the central organisations and VST ry received positive feedback for their notable efforts to support sustainable development and encourage educational institutions to implement sustainable development in practice.

1.2 Definition of sustainable development

The global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by the UN in 2015. The 2030 Agenda is the first plan of action and set of goals for UN Member States to achieve sustainable development.

Finland takes global responsibility and has assumed an active and pioneering role in the efforts towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda. The Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland has in its own strategy promised to strengthen its international impact and global responsibility and commit to sustainable development.

Sustainable development, sustainability and responsibility are core values in the work of liberal adult education institutions. Learning, education and culture are prerequisites for social development. Education is visible in and has an impact on society in the form of competence, creativity and a sense of responsibility across generations. Hence, education is not just about thinking or reflecting, but also about doing.

Different educational institutions are used to using different terminology due to historical reasons, the background of the organisations operating them or the way they operate. Because of this, the review also involved defining what is meant by sustainable development in this context:

Sustainable development means development that ensures good living conditions for present and future generations. The UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to eradicate extreme poverty and achieve sustainable development that takes equal account of the environment, the economy and people. The guiding principle of the programme is that no one is left behind.

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Its basic elements are ecological, economic, social and cultural sustainability. The purpose of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda is to help people learn how to live in harmony with nature and with each other.

An integral part of sustainable development is the notion that the Earth has limits. Human activity must be adapted to the natural resources available on Earth and the carrying capacity of the environment.

In this review, sustainability was examined specifically from the perspective of educational institutions. The terms responsibility, sustainability, sustainable action or sustainable future used by institutions are understood in this review to mean the same thing as sustainable development.

2. SURVEY RESULTS

2.1 Data collection and respondents

The data collection covering all liberal adult education institutions in Finland (adult education centres, folk high schools, summer universities, sports institutes and study centres) was carried out in the form of a survey in Finnish and Swedish in February–April 2025. The survey was conducted as an online Webropol survey and sent to the principals of all liberal adult education institutions by email. Responses to the survey were received from 263 liberal adult education institutions, representing almost 92% (91.6%) of all liberal adult education institutions in Finland (287). One response was also received from outside mainland Finland, from Åland. It was also included in the survey.

Of the respondents, 59.7% (n=157/172) were adult education centres, 25.9% (n=68/74) were folk high schools, 6.8% (n=18/19) were summer universities, 4.2% (n=11/11) were study centres and 3.4% (n=9/11) were sports institutes.

Of the respondents, 236 responded in Finnish and 27 in Swedish. The survey included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions.

Responses that were ambiguous or unrelated to the question were not included in the analysis. The responses to the open-ended questions were analysed qualitatively. The results are presented in the report as frequencies and percentages and illustrated with frequency tables.

TABLE 1. RESPONDENTS BY TYPE OF INSTITUTION

Type of institution	Number of respondents	Response rate
Adult education centre	157	91%
Folk high school	68	92%
Summer university	18	95%
Sports institute	9	82%
Study centre	11	100%

TABLE 2. EXAMPLES OF WHAT SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT MEANS TO RESPONDENTS

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	1. Environmental consciousness and environmental responsibility: "Commissioning of a solar power plant." "We reduce food waste and recycle." "Waste sorting and collection was reformed in 2023." "Recycling, reuse of materials and environmental consciousness." "Saving energy, recycling and sustainable solutions." "Recycling, environmental friendliness and respect for nature." "Digital educational materials available."
	2. Community and inclusion: "Employees are committed to the sustainable development programme." "A birdhouse work party, in which we made new and repaired old birdhouses." "Cooperation with local actors, such as renting out premises." "We are part of the city's sustainable development plan." "We organise an annual Sustainability Week and events." "Participatory and community-integrated activities."
	3. Social sustainability and equality: "Accessibility by public transport, distance learning and training materials in electronic format." "Equal opportunities for all." "We help those with challenges in finding employment." "We take into account the needs of different types of students." "Community cohesion and participation for all." "We promote wellbeing and equality."
	4. Sustainable lifestyles and everyday activities: "Our aim is to integrate sustainable development into everyday operations." "Learning and integration into teaching." "We cover sustainability in all subjects." "Local food and bioenergy plant." "We reduce unnecessary travel and save local resources." "Our goal is to reduce waste and operate ecologically." "Small daily community actions such as waste sorting and saving energy."
	5. Consistency, strategy and development: "Sustainable development plan and goals." "Continuous evaluation and updating of the plan." "Sustainable development themes integrated into education." "Our strategy emphasises sustainable development as part of all our activities." "Certificates and audits, such as the OKKA Foundation certificate." "The SDGs are part of the institution's strategy."
	6. Economic and resource efficiency: "No unnecessary purchases, resources treated responsibly." "Resource and everyday efficiency." "Economic efficiency and sustainable solutions in everything we do." "Responsible procurement and procedures."

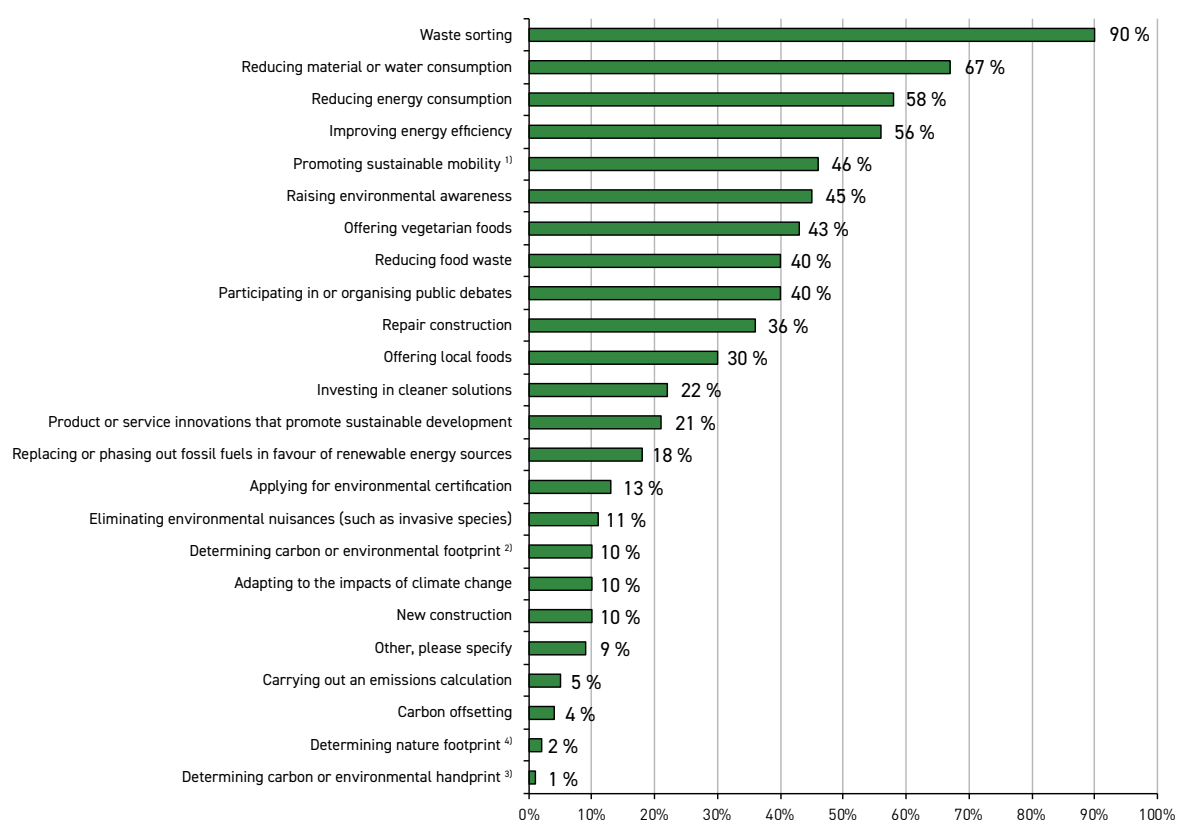
2.2 Perspectives on sustainable development in liberal adult education institutions

Achieving sustainable development requires a holistic approach as well as decision-making and measures that combine environmental, social, cultural and administrative-economic perspectives at the same time.

Respondents were asked to select all the options from the survey's lists of sustainability measures that their institution had implemented from an environmental, social, cultural and administrative-economic perspective.

FIGURE 1. WHAT SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED IN YOUR INSTITUTION FROM AN ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE?

Number of respondents: 263



Environmental sustainability

Sustainable development requires maintaining biodiversity and the functioning of ecosystems and adapting human economic and material activities to nature's carrying capacity in the long term. In addition to national measures, international cooperation plays a key role in the pursuit of environmental sustainability.

By far the most common environmental measure implemented in liberal adult education institutions is waste sorting, which was mentioned by more than 90% of respondents. More than half of the institutions have reduced their consumption of materials, water and energy and improved their energy efficiency by switching to geothermal and solar energy. These measures have been taken into account in repair construction in particular. Institutions that use premises owned by e.g. a municipality follow the municipality's guidelines.

Almost half of the institutions have promoted sustainable mobility¹, raised environmental awareness and participated in public debate. A few individual institutions offer electric car charging or bicycle purchase benefits for their staff.

The use of environmentally friendly, plant-based and recycled materials is a key part of the teaching and operations of liberal adult education institutions. Approximately 40% of respondents report that they offer vegetarian food for students and reduce food waste.

In terms of environmental sustainability, recycling and waste sorting work well. Institutions communicate about their practical environmental actions and take into account environmental friendliness in their material purchases. They also offer a range of environmental courses and public events. Institutions contribute to positive climate impacts through a variety of measures, such as the reuse of old products.

Very few liberal adult education institutions have consciously measured the positive or negative external impacts of their own operations. Only 12 institutions have carried out emissions calculations² and 10 have carried out carbon offsetting. Measures by which institutions can increase their environmental sustainability include measuring their carbon or environmental handprint³ and calculating their nature footprint⁴. Indeed, almost all institutions have room for improvement in their comprehensive and systematic environmental work.

In their responses to the open-ended questions of the survey, respondents reported identifying additional needs in regard to staff training, the drawing up of sustainable development plans and applying for environmental certifications. Good examples mentioned in the responses include an institution that has bought protected forests every year during Sustainability Week, and a planned EKOina study programme, which focuses on reducing an individual's environmental footprint.

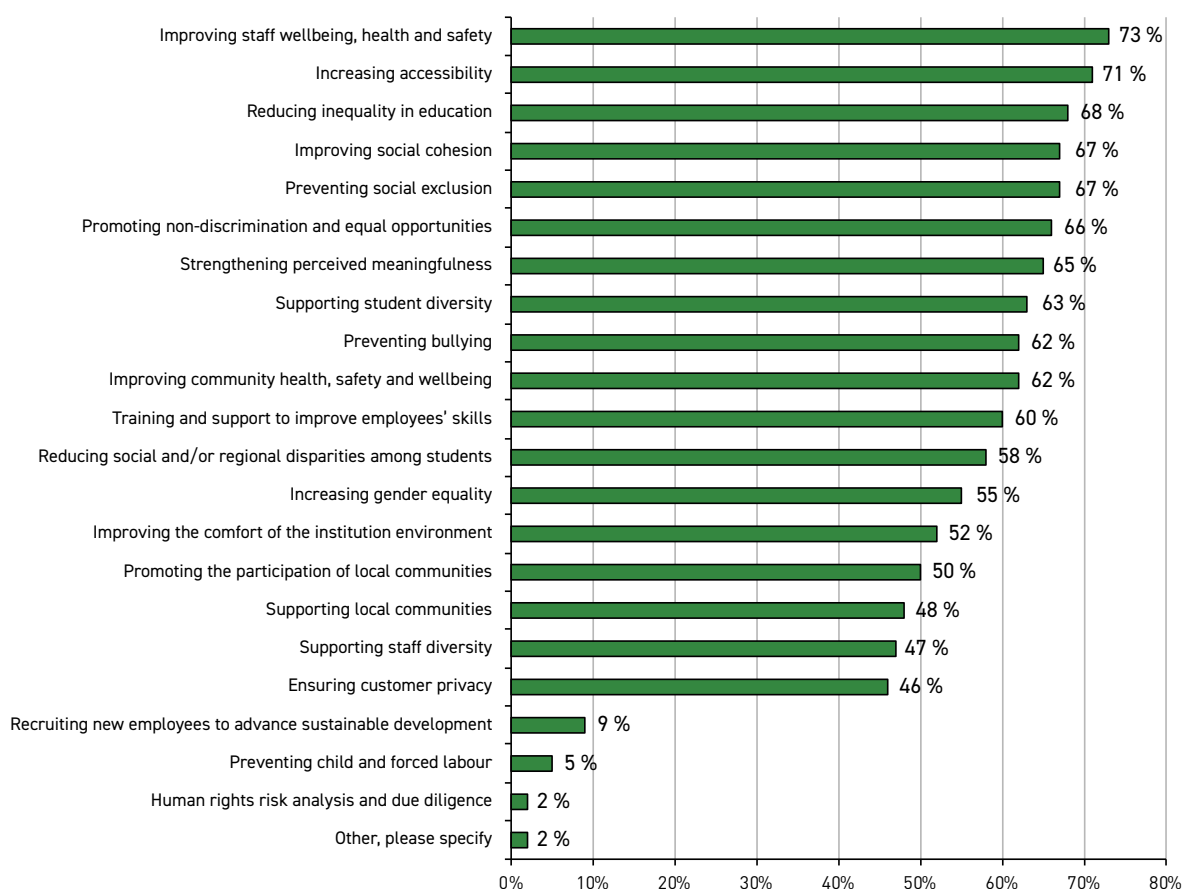
"Installation of new bike racks and carpooling."

"Minimising food waste through good planning."

- 1) Sustainable mobility means modes of transport that are environmentally and socially sustainable, economical, convenient and safe and promote the health and wellbeing of the people using them. The preferred choices are walking, cycling and public transport. Where using a car is necessary, car sharing, carpooling, park-and-ride, low-emission cars and economical driving should be encouraged. Sustainable mobility also includes reducing the need to travel through remote working, teleconferencing and e-services.
- 2) A carbon footprint measures the greenhouse gas emissions generated during the life cycle of a product or activity.
- 3) A carbon handprint describes the positive climate impacts that can be achieved by replacing an old product or service with a new one, for example.
- 4) A nature footprint describes the impact of human activities on biodiversity and especially the loss thereof.

FIGURE 2. WHAT SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED IN YOUR INSTITUTION FROM A SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE?

Number of respondents: 263



Social sustainability

Social sustainability focuses on ensuring the wellbeing and quality of life of all citizens. This includes promoting equality, reducing poverty and implementing social rights. Social sustainability ensures that future generations have good living conditions and opportunities for a good life.

Liberal adult education institutions see social sustainability as a very important core value. The institutions' operations are strongly guided by the promotion and maintenance of social justice. This is also reflected in the responses, with over 60% of respondents selecting the options reducing inequality in education, preventing social exclusion, improving social cohesion, promoting non-discrimination and equal opportunities and strengthening perceived meaningfulness.

Improving staff wellbeing, health and safety was the most commonly implemented measure. Improving community health, safety and wellbeing was also among the most commonly implemented measures. Increasing the accessibility of studies is perceived by more than 70% of the respondents as an important social sustainability measure. However, only half of the respondents selected the option supporting local communities. Based on the responses to the open-ended questions, accessibility was mainly understood as physical accessibility.

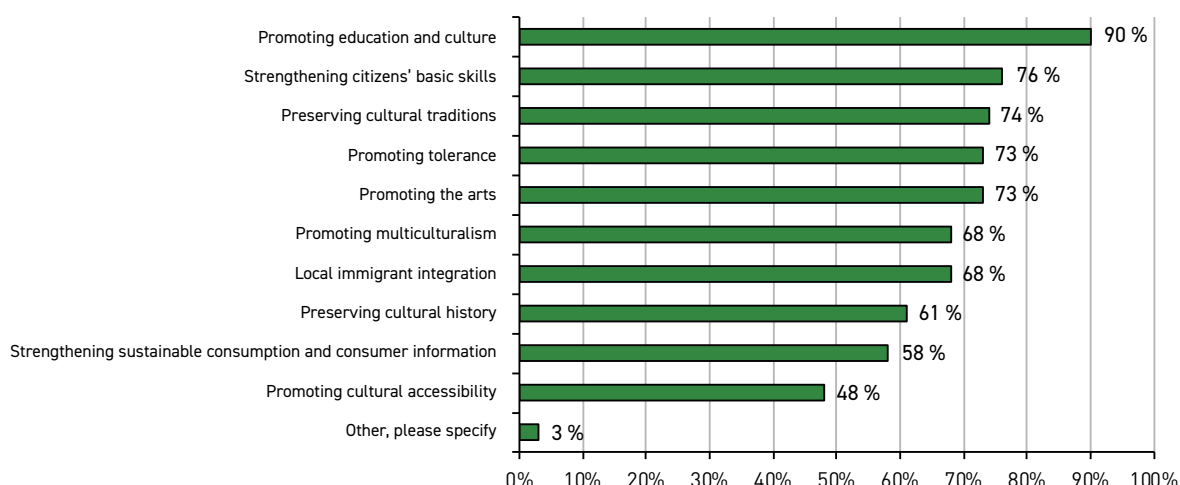
Social sustainability is also contributed to by promoting equality and non-discrimination. The responses show that institutions are focused on implementing social sustainability within their institutions, but that expanding it to the wider society is more limited. A dozen institutions mention that their courses also aimed at reaching those at risk of social exclusion and that they have decentralised their operations to take place not only at their main location, but in villages as well, with teachers going out to the students.

According to the respondents, social sustainability is least visible in terms of human rights risk analysis, due diligence or preventing child and forced labour.

"We promote socially sustainable development by working to ensure that the conditions for wellbeing and inclusion are equally distributed. Our courses are targeted at under-represented groups. By educating them, and by providing education in basic skills, we contribute to socially sustainable development."

FIGURE 3. WHAT SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED IN YOUR INSTITUTION FROM A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE?

Number of respondents: 263



Cultural sustainability

Cultural sustainability facilitates the preservation and development of cultures from one generation to the next. It supports people's emotional growth and cultural diversity, which is important for human identity and community.

Cultural sustainability is very much at the heart of the educational mission of liberal adult education institutions. More than 90% of respondents chose promoting education and culture as their most important cultural sustainability measure. More than 70% of respondents highlighted strengthening citizens' basic skills, preserving cultural traditions and promoting the arts. Concrete examples provided by the respondents included promoting the preservation of historic architecture, teaching traditional crafts, language sensitivity in all teaching, promoting cross-artistic approaches in productions and diversifying the local cultural offering through concerts, exhibitions and dance and theatre performances.

Less than half of respondents selected the options promoting cultural accessibility and strengthening sustainable consumption and consumer information. In both of these areas, liberal adult education institutions could play a significantly larger role, thereby strengthening their role in society.

"The preservation of cultural heritage is an important part of our institution's activities, which is particularly evident in events and course content."

FIGURE 4. WHAT SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED IN YOUR INSTITUTION FROM AN ADMINISTRATIVE AND ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE?

Number of respondents: 263



Administrative and economic sustainability

Economic sustainability is about balanced and sustained economic growth that is not based on debt or the destruction of natural resources. A sustainable economy enables society to maintain its essential functions and promotes wellbeing. Administrative sustainability is achieved through an organisational culture, staff training and operating models that are designed to ensure ethical operation and prevent abuse. This report uses the term administrative-economic sustainability.

More than 86% of respondents reported that they have increased the utilisation rate and multipurpose use of their premises. The sharing and broader use of premises, including with other actors, have also increased. Similarly, reusing goods is very common (almost 80% of respondents), and shared use of goods is popular with almost 70% of respondents. Almost 65% of respondents also mention applying for project funding as one of their administrative sustainability measures.

Only three out of four respondents highlighted the principles of good governance as a key part of their operations. Similarly, only approximately half of respondents selected strengthening the responsible management of the educational institution.

Liberal adult education institutions have room for improvement in applying sustainability criteria in purchasing and procurement decisions, transport optimisation and auditing subcontracting and/or supply chains. Providing education and training to strengthen financial skills is not on the agenda of many institutions, with less than a quarter of respondents indicating that they offer it.

Liberal adult education institutions have continued to increase opportunities for remote participation since the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling a wider range of people to participate. Respondents also reported repairing and refurbishing their existing equipment. Similarly, respondents make more use of local experts and actors as instructors than in the past, for example to avoid travel.

2.3 Sustainable development in education and training

Through its strategy, the Ministry of Education and Culture guides the entire education and culture sector to operate in a way that promotes sustainable development. According to the strategy, the Ministry of Education and Culture aims to strengthen everyone's knowledge, skills and competence, renew our society through creative, inquiry-based and responsible action and provide equal opportunities for a meaningful life (Ministry of Education and Culture Strategy 2030, 2019).

The Ministry of Education and Culture has drawn up a Sustainable Development Policy (2020) to guide activities in its administrative branch towards sustainability in line with the objectives of the strategy. By means of education, research, cultural, youth and sport policies, it is possible to participate in the promotion of all SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. The sustainable development policy states, among other things, that the "Ministry of Education and Culture encourages early childhood education and care providers and education providers to integrate sustainable development perspectives into their education" and "promotes competence in sustainable development by strengthening cooperation between formal, non-formal and informal education" (Sustainable development policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture and its administrative branch, 2020).

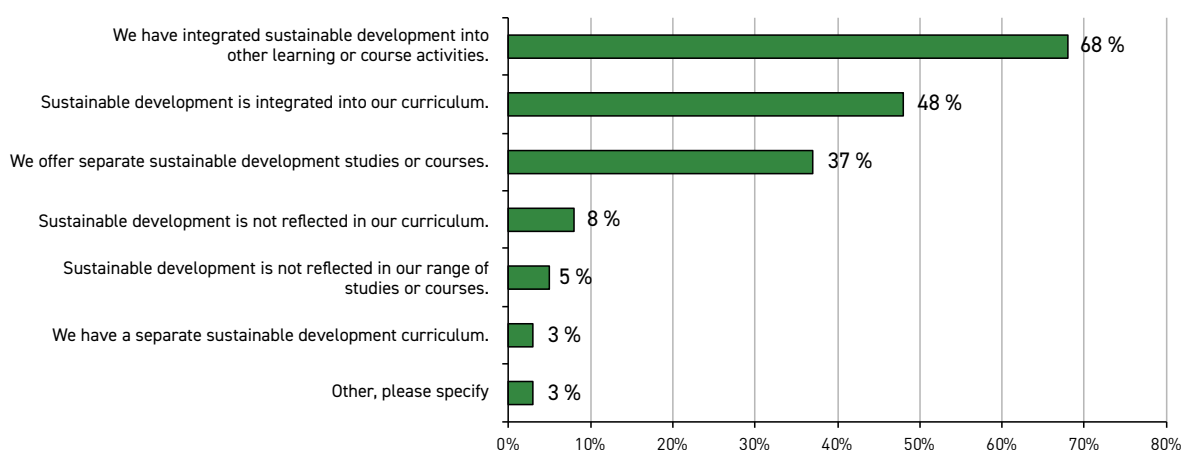
The Ministry of Education and Culture monitors and evaluates the implementation of the policies on a sector-specific basis and jointly in the entire administrative branch. As part of the educational and cultural administration of Finland, the promotion of sustainability themes is also supported by the Finnish National Agency for Education.

The sustainable development policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture and its administrative branch is reflected in the national core curricula for early childhood education and care, pre-primary education and primary and lower secondary (basic) education, the national qualification requirements for vocational education and training and the national core curriculum for basic education in the arts. Learning objectives concerning sustainable development are also included in the national core curriculum for the liberal adult education of folk high schools aimed at persons within the scope of compulsory education, the national core curriculum for integration training and the national core curriculum for primary and lower secondary (basic) education for adults (eRequirements, 2021).

In 2024, the Finnish National Agency for Education published the national basic skills badges. These skills badges are a way for adult learners to make their skills visible, e.g. in the labour market or when applying for education and training. Sustainable development is taken into account in all the badges, and they contribute to sustainable development. Three of the badges have sustainability as a specific theme: a sustainable future (*kestävä tulevaisuus*), environmentally responsible home (*kodin ympäristövastuullisuus*) and participating in democratic society (*toimiminen yhteiskunnassa*).

FIGURE 5. HOW IS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT REFLECTED IN CURRICULA AND EDUCATION CONTENT?

Number of respondents: 263



Respondents were asked whether their institution had adopted a systematic approach to promoting sustainable development. Almost all institutions (92.8%, n=244) report having done so. Of these, 50, or 19%, have drawn up a separate sustainable development plan. Approximately a fifth (n=58) have a sustainability plan in place as part of some other plan.

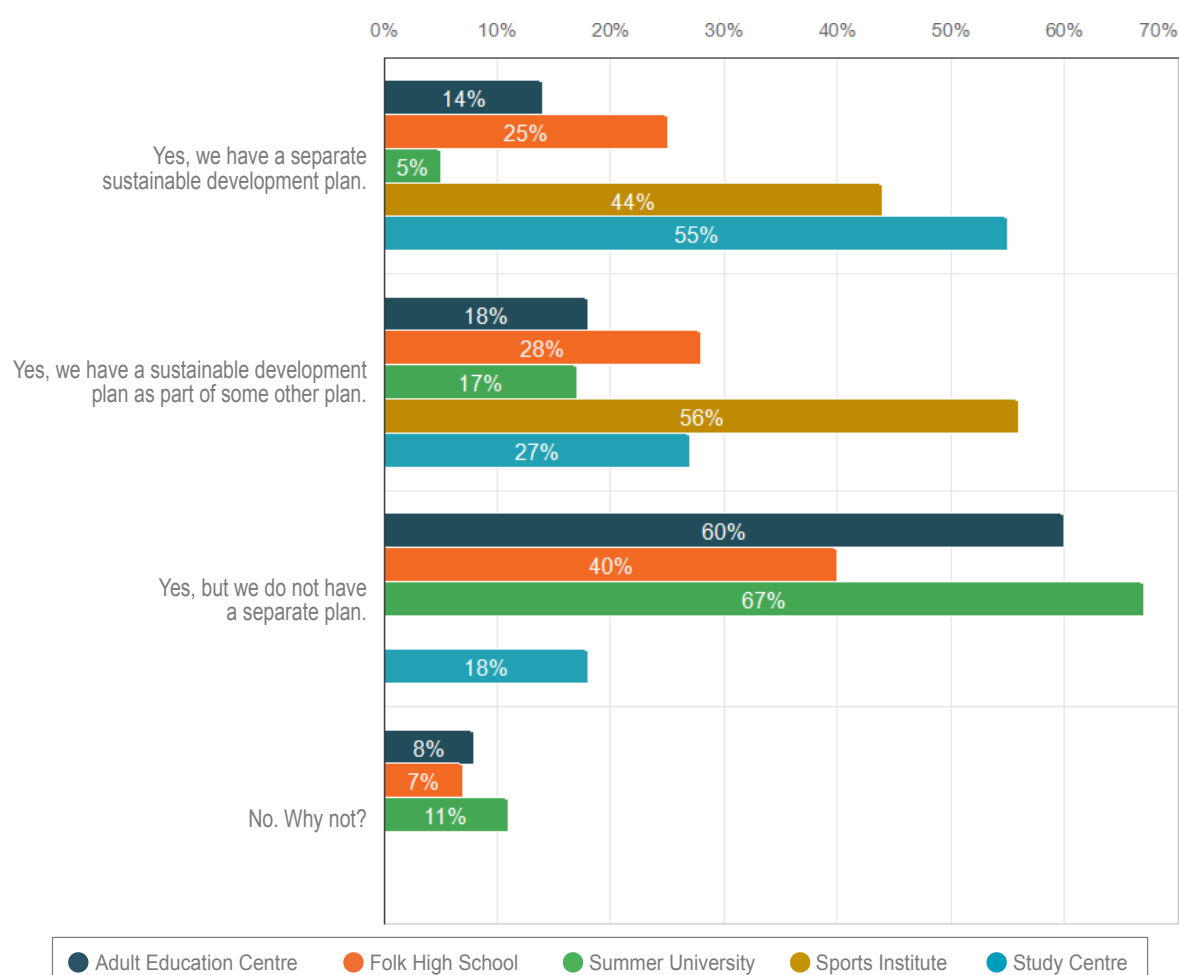
According to the survey responses, approximately 70% of institutions have integrated sustainable development into other learning or course activities. Less than half of respondents reported that it is integrated into their curriculum. Seven respondents reported that their institution had drawn up a separate sustainable development curriculum. A total of 12.5% of respondents said that sustainable development is not reflected in their curricula or their range of studies or courses. One of the reasons given for this was that sustainability matters are taken into account in everyday operations and guidelines anyway.

The reasons given for not having a sustainable development plan by institutions that did not have one (n=19) were that the work was still underway, that sustainable development was part of other plans or that the preparation of a plan had not been started in time due to mergers or staff changes, for example. Some respondents have prioritised other areas of development or taken sustainable development into account in everyday operations and guidelines without a specific plan. A few institutions reported that their lessor takes care of property-related matters, for example, or that they implement their municipalities' sustainable development plans.

Of the institutions that had a sustainable development plan in place, 35.3% had drawn it up in collaboration with staff and students. Approximately a quarter (24.7%) follow a plan drawn up by their operator. The number of institutions that had a plan in place, but had not drawn it up in collaboration with students, was 25.

FIGURE 6. HAS YOUR INSTITUTION ADOPTED A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

Number of respondents: 263



Just under 40% (n=94) of respondents report that their institution has a designated person responsible for sustainable development matters. The person responsible is usually the principal, vice-principal or a designated teacher. In most cases, the person responsible for sustainable development matters was also the person who responded to the survey. At some institutions, sustainable development matters are also handled by persons responsible for development or education and training content.

In a few institutions, sustainable development matters are the responsibility of the person in charge of finance, administration, property or communication. Only a couple of institutions have appointed a dedicated sustainable development coordinator or sustainability specialist. The reason for this is limited human resources.

Of the respondents, 231 institutions reported that all of their staff are involved in implementing sustainable development. Less than 10% of respondents have assigned implementation to a specific person, and only seven institutions report that it is not part of anyone's job description.

"Courses are designed so that the principles of sustainable development are integrated into teaching and course design."

FIGURE 7. DOES YOUR INSTITUTION HAVE A DESIGNATED PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT MATTERS?

Number of respondents: 263

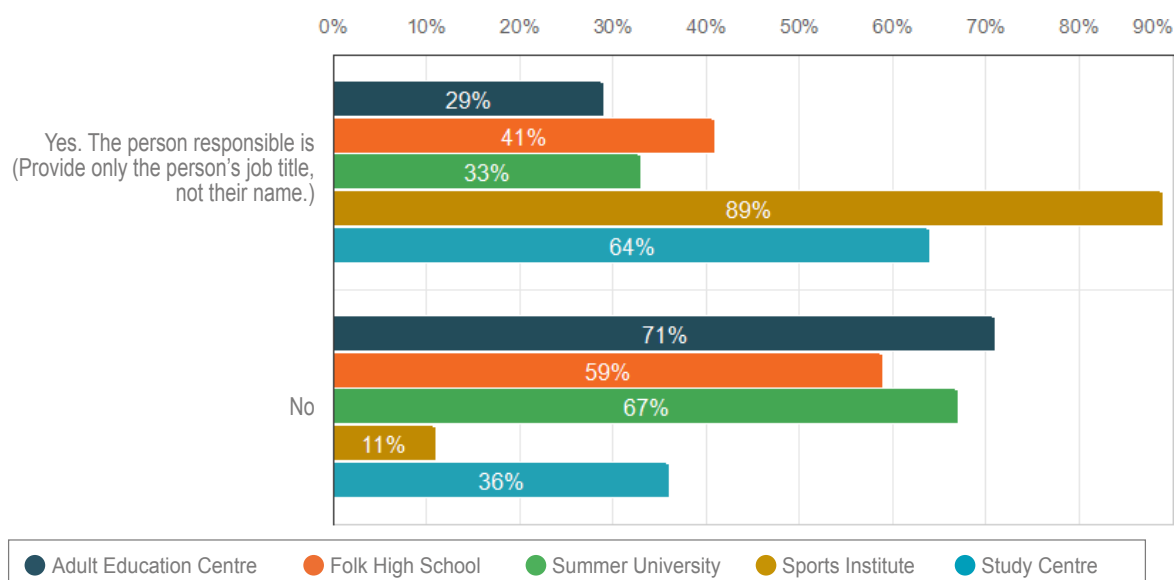
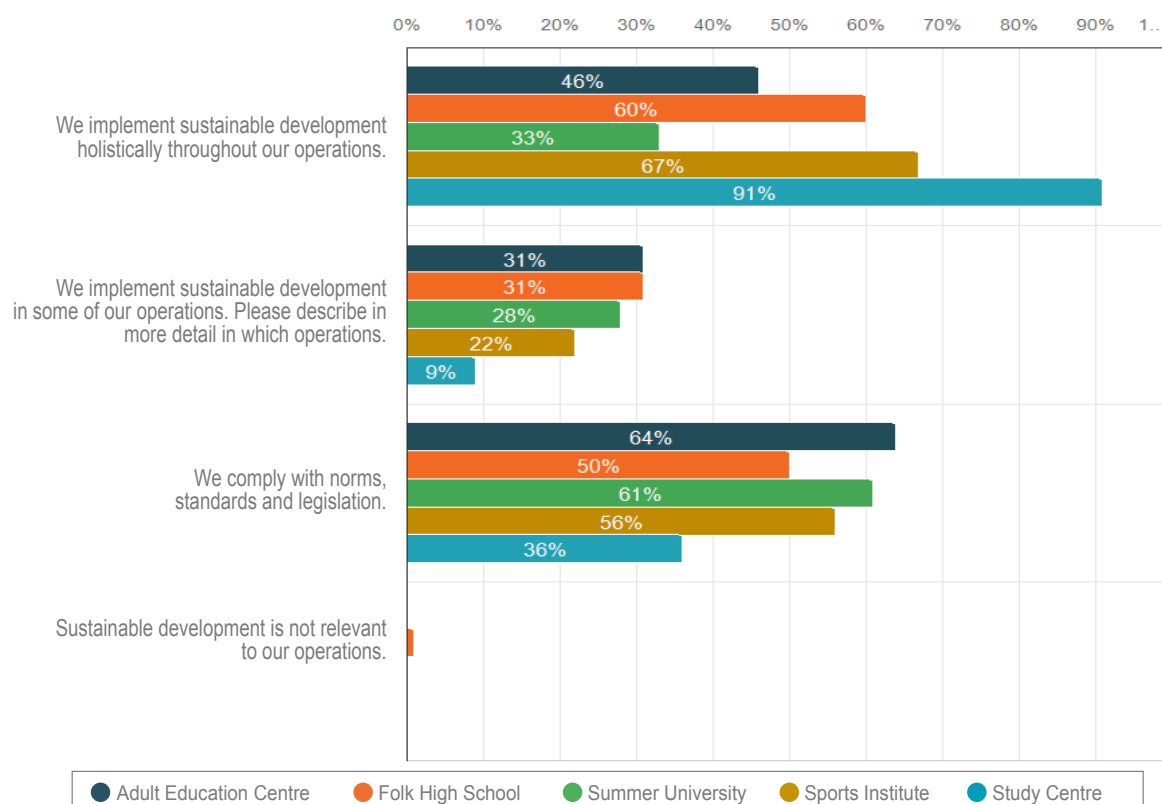


FIGURE 8. HOW IS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT REFLECTED IN YOUR OPERATIONS?

Number of respondents: 263



The responses show that sustainable development is reflected in the operations of liberal adult education institutions in a variety of ways. It is part of the plans in place in institutions, and the operations of most institutions are based on the principles of sustainable development. The principles are reflected in practice in teaching, everyday practices, procurement and property management.

Almost a hundred institutions offer separate studies or courses in sustainable development. Respondents were asked to describe how the education and training that they had provided develop students' sustainable development competence. The responses received have been classified into six thematic groups.

Examples of the implementation of sustainable development in education and training

1. Sustainable lifestyles and everyday skills

Students are guided to adopt sustainable lifestyles and make responsible choices in everyday life. For example, students learn about responsible use of natural resources in mushroom and wild herb courses.

Recycled materials are favoured in crafts courses, and students are guided to make only the products that they need. Old furniture is given a new life in a furniture restoration and customisation course. Students are taught self-awareness, emotional regulation, interaction,

tolerance and patience in visual arts, music, language, physical education and wellbeing courses. These contribute to the mental and physical wellbeing and resilience of both the individual and group. Forest gyms, stair training and forest yoga involve making use of nature sports facilities, relaxing or exercising in nature, learning to experience the connection with nature and observing oneself and the environment.

2. Recycling, reuse and the circular economy

The majority of the responses emphasise that the courses offered by institutions teach concrete skills such as recycling, waste sorting, composting and energy saving. Crafts and arts courses emphasise the use of recycled materials and the restoration of old goods, contributing to resource efficiency, self-sufficiency, the circular economy and sustainable consumption.

Institutions that organise public lectures highlighted energy efficiency in housing, electric cars and the circular economy as examples of topical issues covered.

3. Learning and raising awareness about environmental and social issues

The courses offered strengthen civic and basic skills, such as environmental and social awareness. Courses and lectures cover topics such as biodiversity, climate change, the value of sustainable consumption and the role of community in building a sustainable future.

4. Inclusion and community

Creating a sense of community is part of social sustainability, and is emphasised both within and between groups of students. The survey responses highlight that students are encouraged to participate in practical activities and community work, such as nature trips, voluntary clean-ups, flea markets and collaborative projects. This increases inclusion and community responsibility in building a sustainable future.

Approximately half of the institutions report that they offer courses in cooperation with entrepreneurs, organisations and other educational institutions, providing new perspectives and networking opportunities. Students are given the opportunity to influence the content of the next study period, which promotes their participation and empowerment.

5. Equality and accessibility

The aim is to reduce inequalities, enable as many people as possible to learn about sustainable development and support lifelong learning. It is important for liberal adult education providers that the education is open, affordable and equitable. Their education makes extensive use of electronic materials and distance learning.

Approximately a fifth of respondents report that they organise education and courses especially for immigrants and marginalised people. The diverse groups of students taking part in these provide opportunities to learn how to get along with people of different ages, backgrounds and life situations. Institutions invest in creating psychological safety and supporting group cohesion. For example, anti-racism education increases students' understanding of how to interact with different people.

6. Cooperation and active citizenship

Institutions also increase their sustainable development competence by engaging in cooperation with other organisations, companies and communities. The impact of education is

broadened through practical cooperation projects. A few institutions reported organising a Sustainability Week each year.

Liberal adult education contributes to sustainable development competence both directly and indirectly by strengthening lifelong learning, equality, inclusion and wellbeing. Building and supporting communities and a culture of inclusion is important. Courses cover current social issues and encourage critical thinking and responsible action.

"We teach that less is more."

"We organise an annual Sustainability Week and events."

"We strive to ensure equal access for all to the operations of the adult education centre through Kaikukortti¹ activities and study vouchers."

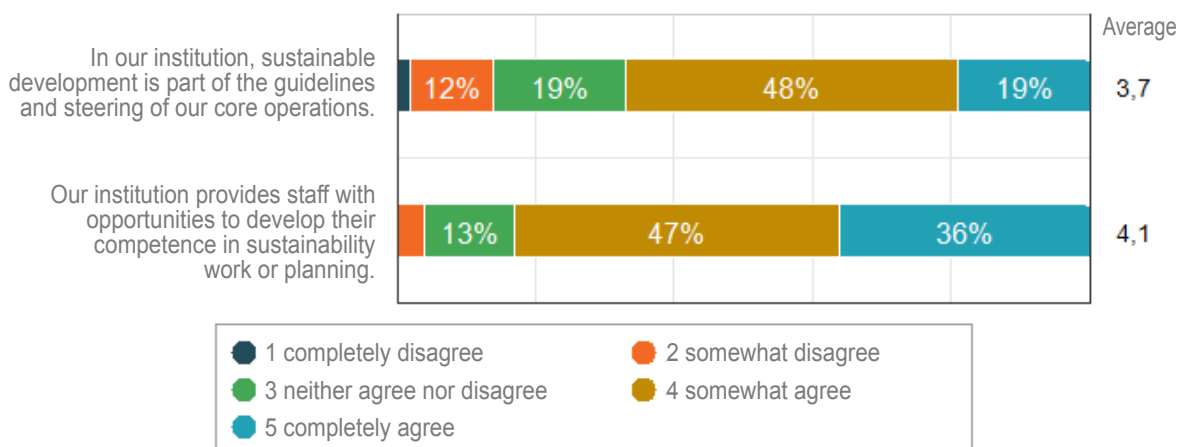
2.4 Steering, reporting and evaluation

Steering

The survey asked respondents for their views on the extent to which sustainable development is part of the guidelines and steering of their core operations. Of the respondents, 67% somewhat or fully agreed that it is a guiding principle. As many as 83% felt that staff are given the opportunity to develop their competence in sustainability work and planning.

FIGURE 9. EXTENT TO WHICH OPERATIONS ARE STEERED BY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Number of respondents: 259



¹ The aim of Kaikukortti is to improve the possibilities of young people, adults and families in a tight financial situation to participate in cultural life and engage in art.

Many liberal adult education institutions integrate sustainable development into staff induction, either directly or as part of the overview of operations and strategy. Staff induction involves going over the institution's values, procedures and principles of sustainable development related to day-to-day practices such as recycling, energy saving and responsible procurement, for example. Induction often takes place in teachers' meetings, on the intranet or through separate induction materials.

Institutions have developed electronic induction materials, online training and learning platforms, enabling access to materials for the whole organisation.

One of the challenges reported by institutions is that internal guidelines and criteria for sustainable development are still incomplete or inadequate. Many institutions recognise the need for more systematic, strategic induction and more training on sustainable development themes.

The survey asked respondents how the drawing up of sustainable development plans has affected the practices and atmosphere of the institution. Several institutions report that drawing up sustainable development plans has increased awareness and commitment among staff and students. It has strengthened a shared culture of values and action, and made sustainable thinking part of daily choices, communication and activities. A shared vision and goal-setting have also contributed to a sense of community and shared responsibility. Community-building activities such as joint events, development days and feedback surveys have improved the atmosphere and increased commitment.

The visibility of the plans and goals has led to concrete pressure for action and change. Operations have become more systematic, with things such as recycling and responsible sourcing becoming part of normal operations. Visual guidelines and communication have also increased the visibility of sustainability actions.

As good examples, institutions mentioned innovations and finding new ways of working. Staff have undergone training, and new training products have been developed. Institutions have also felt that they are making a small contribution to the protection of local nature and the environment.

While the impacts are positive, more than half of the respondents mentioned that the implementation of plans and activities requires a more systematic approach and planned resourcing. Systematic integration deeper into day-to-day operations and strategy would require more planning, management commitment and monitoring. Resource constraints and funding cuts can also slow down progress and cause pressure to prioritise other things.

Drawing up sustainable development plans has raised awareness and strengthened a common set of values and the concrete implementation of a number of important themes in the plans, such as bullying prevention, equality, non-discrimination and environmental responsibility. Sustainability thinking has become part of everyday choices and communication. The themes have also become more visible to students, supporting the perception of meaningful and responsible learning.

Cooperation with local organisations, companies and educational institutions has enabled more cost-effective and accessible education solutions. The use of digital tools has freed up resources and made operations more efficient and flexible. Targeted communication has improved the accessibility of the education offered for a wide range of people. Inclusive course provision has fostered a sense of community and supported the implementation of the principles of the sustainable development strategy.

Reporting and evaluation

The survey also included questions about reporting on sustainable development. Of the respondents, 82 institutions, or 31.2%, indicated that they do not report on sustainable development at all. The responses included comments saying that the institutions do not report on sustainable development separately or report on it only when specifically requested to do so.

Those institutions that indicated reporting on sustainable development (181, or 68.8%) primarily report on their progress within their organisations, often as part of annual reports, financial reports, strategy monitoring and development reports. Progress is reported to the management team, the board, the board of directors or working groups.

For some respondents, the reporting framework is derived from existing standards and certificates. For example, an institution certified by the OKKA Foundation evaluates its sustainable development performance internally every year as part of other performance evaluations. The certificate is renewed every three years, at which time a self-evaluation and an external audit are carried out.

Institutions also report to external parties, such as funders, partners, ministries, ELY Centres and the Finnish National Agency for Education. A few institutions also mention international cooperation projects, such as the Erasmus network.

Institutions that operate as part of a municipal or city organisation report through existing reporting systems to e.g. education committees or city management teams or as part of the reporting of environmental programmes or municipal strategies.

Communication to the general public was also seen as an important part of reporting. Institutions communicate about their sustainability work to the outside world via newsletters, communication networks, online and media publications.

Over the years, both international and national frameworks and standards have been developed to structure and measure sustainable development work. The UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which in 2015 set out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets to accelerate sustainability efforts by countries and other actors alike, has remained somewhat remote for educational institutions. Only just over half of respondents selected it as a guiding framework.

For sports institutes, Sustainable Travel Finland is the most widely used measurement system. The Sustainable Travel Finland programme and the Sustainable Travel Finland label that can be earned through it were developed for tourism companies and destinations by Visit Finland. The purpose of the programme is to support the tourism industry in responding to changing demand and securing its future by developing sustainably.

Of the respondents, 32.5% mention using the OKKA Foundation certificate. It is a quality management system run by the OKKA Foundation that provides evaluation tools, materials, guidance and training to support the sustainable development work of schools and educational institutions. The system also allows for external evaluation and certification.

Various eco-labels, such as the Nordic Swan Ecolabel, the EU Ecolabel, the EU Energy Label and the EU organic logo, are used by 23.5% of institutions. Other guiding standards mentioned by the respondents include the Energy Efficiency Agreement for Municipal Sector, resource efficiency roadmaps, Green Office, Welcome Cyclist, the National Energy and Climate Strategy, Discrimination-Free Zone, antiracism principles, GreenComp and the values of the underlying organisation.

FIGURE 10. WHICH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORKS AND STANDARDS ARE YOUR INSTITUTION'S OPERATIONS INFLUENCED BY?

Number of respondents: 166



Evaluation practices vary widely between institutions. Institutions in whose operations sustainable development plays a major part have also integrated it more strongly into their reporting and evaluation systems. Evaluation and reporting is carried out quarterly, semi-annually or as part of annual reporting, in accordance with the organisation's operating model.

Around a dozen institutions report that they carry out evaluation in real time in their daily operations and decision-making. The same number carry out evaluation less frequently, e.g. every three years, if they follow an external evaluation system.

Some institutions do not evaluate the effectiveness of their plans regularly or at all. The proportion of such responses was 19.2%.

2.5 Making sustainable development visible

Sustainable development can be perceived as a rather abstract concept, and therefore making it concrete and communicating about it are key tools for promoting sustainability activities. Respondents were asked how they make their sustainable development actions visible to different target groups.

Staff

93% of respondents completely or somewhat agreed that their staff are involved in setting objectives and planning activities. Institutions promote sustainable development through collaborative planning, discussions and joint events, including with students. Operations are monitored and reformed systematically, and staff are encouraged to experiment and test new approaches.

Institutions make their sustainable development actions visible to staff through internal communication, team meetings and action plans. They organise sustainable development workshops, induction and training on how to become sustainability education specialists for staff. Examples mentioned included recruiting staff of different ages, including older people as teachers, and a multicultural working community.

Institutions see sustainable development as a strong part of everyday and daily work. In some institutions, procurement is guided by procurement and contract guidelines that take into account factors such as necessity, domesticity, local production, ethical operations and environmental, social and economic sustainability. With regard to premises, institutions pay attention to recycling and to saving energy and water. When renting premises, institutions take into account not only procurement and contract guidelines, but also equality and non-discrimination plans.

Students

Communication aimed at students plays a key role in the concrete implementation of sustainable development in liberal adult education institutions. The themes of sustainable development appear on institutions' notice boards, social media and websites in the form of event and course announcements as well as everyday tips. The majority of institutions' premises are accessible and have waste sorting stations and guidelines for saving energy and water. Teaching facilities are used for a wide range of purposes, and a few institutions have built charging stations for electric vehicles. Institutions also encourage students to use public transport services to reach them. Institutions regularly go over their rules, safe space principles and guidelines with students.

The majority of institutions have integrated sustainable development into their learning materials and the content of instruction. Learning materials are largely digital. Physical materials are recycled and reused, and waste sorting is part of teaching. A few institutions mention course feedback questionnaires, which are designed to include questions on issues of a sustainable future, such as social sustainability and inclusion.

Some institutions organise separate courses, lectures and theme days on the different dimensions of sustainable development. These include food waste reduction weeks and spring exhibitions, in which sustainability work is made visible through both materials and demonstrations. Student councils can also contribute to planning and implementing sustainability matters.

Examples mentioned include a dedicated section on sustainability on the institutions' websites, which tells customers about the different ways in which the institutions are building a sustainable future. Some institutions want to distinguish themselves as bold role models and agents of change. These institutions consider it important to engage operators, students and stakeholders as active agents of change for a sustainable future and to strengthen community cohesion and inclusion as a foundation for meaningful action.

However, more than half of the respondents also report that they have made little active use of sustainable development considerations in student recruitment. Still, it would be possible to make the institution's responsibility, sustainability themes and related varied study content more visible in recruitment materials, such as websites and brochures, in the future. This could attract more students who appreciate sustainable development values and at the same time strengthen the positive image of the institution as a responsible education provider. Supporting low-income groups wherever possible and tailoring courses to local needs, including for people living in remote areas, can also contribute to sustainable development.

Institution operators

Sustainable development measures should also be regularly made visible to the operators of liberal adult education institutions. Governing bodies and boards play an important role in promoting sustainability. After all, they approve the curricula in which sustainable development themes should be included. It is important to include sustainable development in the strategy and annual reports and to monitor progress towards its goals. Maintaining certificates helps with systematic reporting. Another important issue is the responsible and ethical financial management of the institution operators, i.e. how environmental, social and governance issues are taken into account in investment activities.

The operations of many municipal institutions are steered by the municipal strategy, and reporting in accordance with it ensures that operations support the sustainable development goals of the municipal strategy.

Approximately 30% of institutions have so far had no reporting mechanism in place. For some, this is a work in progress, and it is important to agree on practical arrangements.

Surrounding society

More than half of the institutions report that they communicate about sustainable development themes on their websites, on social media and via newspaper advertising. Their communications emphasise sustainable values and responsibility. The SDGs are promoted through events, lectures and fairs, for example. The institutions follow the principles of sustainable development in the use and procurement of premises. Institutions that are having new premises built seek to design them in line with sustainable development principles.

Liberal adult education institutions engage in extensive cooperation with municipalities and their various units and local associations, organisations, companies and entrepreneurs. The institutions communicate about sustainability to their partners and encourage them to operate responsibly. Cooperation with other educational institutions and companies also brings new approaches to sustainable development in education. Responsibility and operating in line with sustainable development principles are criteria for partner selection for some of the institutions. For example, the partnership agreements of sports institutes require partners to commit to the shared sustainability programme of the Finnish sports community. A few institutions have negotiated with public transport operators for good transport connections and discussed ways to clarify recycling with waste management operators.

The institutions partner with companies and employers to organise education and employer-oriented learning that take into account responsibility and sustainability. Through institutional networks, they share good practices and jointly develop education content, including smooth transitions between educational programmes and to the labour market.

The institutions strive to take into account the wishes and needs of the local community as far as possible in the planning of courses related to sustainable development. Examples include biochar, combating invasive species, building solar cells and community farming. Feedback is collected e.g. through image surveys of local residents and responsibility ratings by the institutions' partners. Several institutions mentioned making use of the expertise of local instructors.

The operations of liberal adult education institutions are largely based on community cohesion and inclusion. Many institutions play an important role in integrating and influencing the attitudes of immigrants in their municipalities. Institutions also organise a significant number of senior and veteran activities, wellbeing courses and educational rehabilitation that support both individual and community wellbeing. Some of the institutions mentioned wanting to serve as regionally important learning and meeting places while strengthening social relations and community cohesion in the spirit of sustainable development.

In practice, liberal adult education institutions regularly organise language cafés and other low-threshold events to bring people together and support encounters between people with different backgrounds. The education that they provide contributes to raising the level of education and culture and also provides opportunities for people at risk of social exclusion.

"By living up to our motto "An Arbis for everyone."

"Elements of sustainable development are also highlighted in event communications."

2.6 Impact of changes in the operating environment

The survey asked how liberal adult education institutions have adapted to the various changes in the operating environment over the past few years, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and cuts to central government funding. Some institutions have not been affected in any way by the changes and have hardly had to adapt their operations at all. They report that sustainable development permeates all of their operations anyway.

A large number of institutions report that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated their transformation into agile operators. They have adapted their courses to current needs and integrated sustainable development into existing activities.

However, some institutions report that they have been significantly affected by the changes and have had to reduce their locations, staff and course offerings as a result. On the positive side, cooperation with other liberal education institutions has increased at the same time.

The impacts can be summarised as follows:

1. Expansion of digital solutions and distance learning

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital learning and communication channels. Many institutions switched to offering online, hybrid or remote meetings and courses during the pandemic and have continued to offer them since. Digital methods have made it possible for them to expand and launch new operations quickly.

2. Resource management and cost-effectiveness

Institutions have increased the shared use of facilities and materials and made efforts to reduce consumption by optimising the use of space and moving to digital communication and invoicing, for example. During funding cuts, institutions have focused on strategic savings, such as reducing facilities, freight costs, travel and energy consumption. Many institutions have introduced more recycling and responsible purchasing practices.

3. Adjusting funding and operations

Cuts in government and other sources of funding have forced institutions to make significant operational adjustments, such as reducing and moving courses online, raising prices and reducing staff. On the other hand, reduced funding has led to tighter cost control and more efficient allocation of resources. Institutions also rent out their properties for other purposes. At the same time, institutions have made efforts to find new forms of service and cooperation methods, such as joint projects and cooperation with local actors.

4. Operational development during crises

Crises have forced institutions to develop flexible and diverse approaches, such as hybrid, distance and online learning, and to work more closely with local services and communities. New situations have given rise to fresh and inspiring operating models and activities, such as youth entrepreneurship, podcast production and hiking guide courses. Changes in the external operating environment have also increased the focus on global and peace education. For example, language and integration courses for Ukrainian migrants and topics related to readiness, crisis resilience and preparedness have increased in the content of the courses offered by institutions.

5. Future prospects and continuous adaptation

Institutions expect to continue to adapt their operations due to funding cuts and environmental and safety needs. Their aim for the future is to remain agile, innovative and collaborative, building on tried and tested approaches and digital solutions. Flexibility and community cohesion will help them maintain the principles of sustainable development in a changing environment.

Cuts to central government funding are reflected in reductions in the number of courses offered and the number of participants admitted for each course. The cuts will also significantly reduce

development activities. Still, many respondents felt that sustainable development is one of their core values and a way of working that they want to hold on to. External challenges have also boosted efforts to procure additional funding.

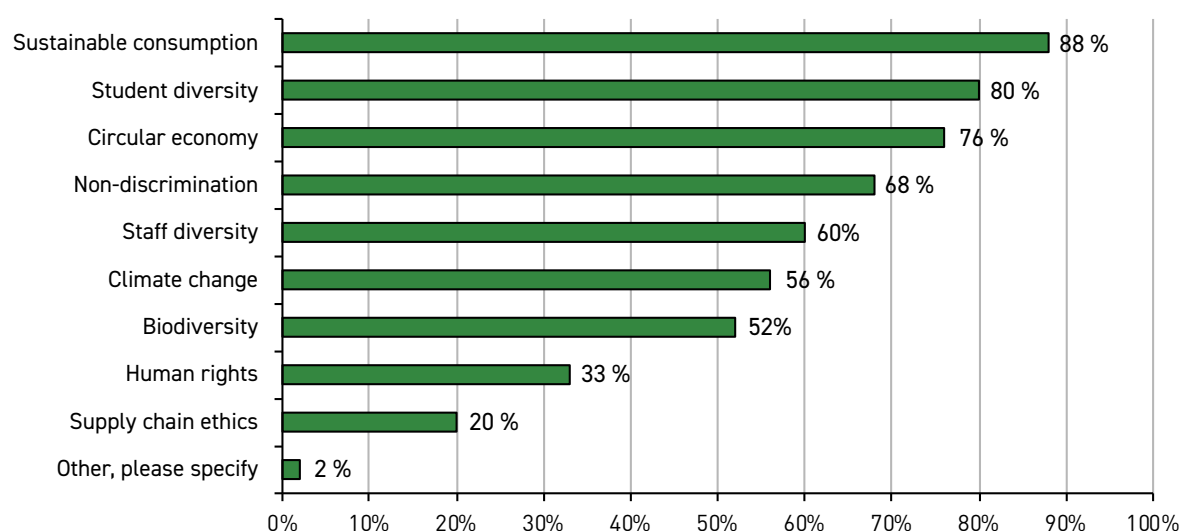
2.7 Future prospects and challenges

The survey asked respondents for their views on which subject areas they expect their institutions to increase the focus on by 2030 and what challenges they face as regards sustainable development.

The respondents expect sustainable consumption (88%) and the circular economy (76%) to play an increasing role in institutions' operations in the future. Institutions also believe both student diversity (80%) and staff diversity (60%) to increase. Furthermore, 68% of respondents believed that non-discrimination would increase. Only approximately half chose climate change (56%) and biodiversity (52%) as subject areas that institutions would increase the focus on by 2030.

FIGURE 11. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SUBJECT AREAS DO YOU EXPECT YOUR INSTITUTION TO INCREASE THE FOCUS ON BY 2030?

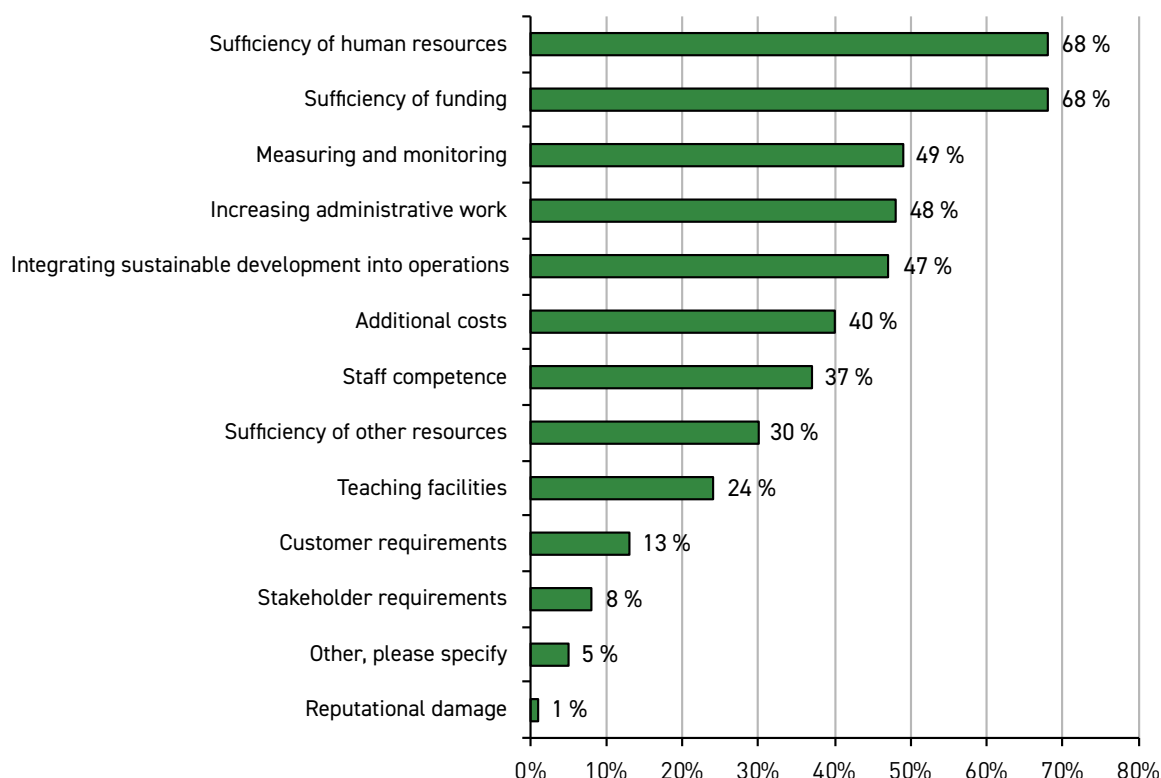
Number of respondents: 263



Institutions saw the sufficiency of human and financial resources as clearly the biggest challenges for the future of sustainable development. The cutbacks already made to these and potential new cutbacks are strongly reflected in the responses. Other future challenges reported included increasing administrative work, the measuring and monitoring of sustainable development and the integration of sustainable development into operations in a holistic way. The respondents were also worried about additional costs and staff competence. Customer and stakeholder requirements were perceived as relatively minor challenges. However, it is precisely these groups that will continue to play a key role in the work of institutions in the future.

FIGURE 12. WHAT CHALLENGES DOES YOUR INSTITUTION FACE AS REGARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

Number of respondents: 263



2.8 Future support needs

Respondents were asked what kind of support and guidance they felt that they needed to plan and implement sustainable development. Based on the responses, support and guidance needs can be divided into five categories:

1. Clear and practical guidelines

Many institutions are in need of concrete, easy-to-apply guidelines for planning and implementing sustainable development.

Concrete requests included sustainable development programme templates and methods, sharing of know-how on pedagogical solutions, training on carbon footprints and handprints, up-to-date information and research, practical examples of solutions that work and cooperation with the best practitioners.

2. Online and distance learning, peer networks and groups

Many institutions would like to receive information and tips on how to implement sustainable development, both at the organisational level and in individual courses, through online training and webinars that they could easily participate in regardless of time and place. Institutions would also value the opportunity to participate in peer networks, where different actors could share experiences and good practices. For example, international and national projects and cooperation between educational institutions are seen as useful.

3. Funding and support opportunities

Institutions would like the government to increasingly steer them to pursue the SDGs and related cooperation through both long-term funding and targeted project funding. Respondents want clear guidelines on how to report on and evaluate sustainable development. Institutions would also like more funding to implement development projects and strengthen staff competence in order to facilitate the implementation of practical measures and plans.

4. Awareness raising and access to materials

Many institutions would like more information on and examples of how to promote sustainable development in practice. These were requested particularly by small operators with limited resources. Materials and guidelines should be easy to find and provide inspiring and concrete tips for everyday solutions and communication.

5. Strengthening cooperation and building networks

Cooperation between different liberal adult education institutions is seen as important. The survey respondents would like to see more projects, peer support, networking and training for sharing good practices and developing sustainable development activities together. They would also like opportunities to share teaching resources and increase the use of shared facilities. Benchmarking between institutions was also mentioned.

A third of respondents also wanted closer cooperation in social advocacy to promote education and sustainable living. More multidisciplinary cooperation with different stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations, municipalities, wellbeing services counties, other educational institutions and networks, universities and e.g. various nature entrepreneurs were identified as future development areas. As concrete ideas for development, institutions proposed new educational content, events and learning environments that put sustainable development into practice. Cooperation can help raise awareness of sustainable development, develop new learning content and make better use of local strengths, such as nature and cultural heritage. Liberal adult education institutions are seen as playing an important role in e.g. promoting integration and developing cooperation with social welfare and employment services to strengthen the inclusion of different groups. Institutions would also like to see cooperation with and support from cities and public authorities to ensure that e.g. sports facilities, events and routes are planned and implemented in a sustainable way.

3. KEY FINDINGS AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

The value base of liberal adult education is firmly anchored in sustainable development. This creates good opportunities for educational institutions to both implement sustainable development holistically within institutions and strengthen their role and agency in society.

The survey showed that sustainable development is perceived as one of the core values of liberal adult education institutions. Sustainable development is part of education and culture, and liberal adult education institutions have an important role to play in promoting lifelong learning, implementing sustainable development through curricula, teaching and course provision, as well as through practical action. The survey shows that sustainable development is part of the operations of institutions in many ways, but that they also feel that they need support and examples of how to make it a more systematic part of their planning and practice. The impacts of liberal adult education on the promotion of sustainable development overall cannot be assessed on the basis of this data.

The cultural dimension emerged as the most important aspect of sustainable development. The promotion of education and the strengthening of civic skills, which are at the heart of liberal adult education, were mentioned in the majority of responses. The promotion of social sustainability is also reflected in the responses, with the aim of bringing education closer to the people. Economic efficiency is reflected in practical actions, both in course material purchases and in recycling. Both the COVID-19 pandemic and cuts to central government funding have forced many institutions to streamline their operations. The environmental perspective is strongly embedded in waste management and energy efficiency. In this area, there are still plenty of ways in which the sustainability of institutions could be improved, including by reducing their carbon and natural footprint, offsetting emissions and increasing their carbon handprint. Other development needs include deepening social responsibility and strengthening accountability in administrative processes, such as supply chains.

Liberal adult education institutions consider it useful to take sustainable development into account in their own operations. In particular, doing so is seen as reinforcing values and the quality of education, building a better world, strengthening citizens' basic skills, increasing inclusion and promoting equality and non-discrimination. It is also seen as strengthening experiential engagement and relevance, promoting fairness and contributing to the mission and vision of the institution.

From a more concrete point of view, sustainable development is seen as beneficial because it has helped reduce costs and secure future operations. It has helped make operations and processes more sustainable and increased job satisfaction. Sustainable development has also contributed to increasing customer satisfaction, brand value and reputation, and to expanding sustainability to new target groups.

The least reported benefits were increased sales, increased economic value and improved competitiveness. Other benefits that the respondents had not found useful were reaching large target groups and increasing student or staff numbers. Risk management and innovation also scored low.

The majority of the survey respondents are of the view that sustainable development is one of their guiding principles. However, the ways in which institutions implement it differ greatly. According to respondents, both staff and students have been offered opportunities to influence how institutions implement sustainable development. These approaches are perceived to have increased engagement, but at the same time many institutions still recognise the need for more systematic planning and education on sustainable development themes.

Much work remains to be done to improve reporting and evaluation. Almost a third of respondents reported that they do not report on sustainable development at all. In terms of evaluation, institutions employ a wide range of different standards or frameworks, and evaluation frequencies vary widely.

Communication is a key tool in the implementation of sustainable development. Sustainable development is an abstract concept, and making it concrete in a comprehensive and systematic way requires unpacking it in all everyday work. Based on the survey responses, institutions communicate effectively about sustainable development to staff and students, but more external communication is needed. Alongside highly visible activities such as waste sorting or recycling, communication should be used as a tool to highlight long-term, cross-cutting actions. Communication also plays an important role in presenting impacts and results clearly.

The resources of educational institutions are devoted to planning and implementing practical activities. The responses showed that issues currently under public discussion, such as the economic situation and the unstable business environment, are also reflected in the emphases of the responses.

More abstract themes, such as mitigating biodiversity loss, adapting to climate change or defending human rights, are seen as challenging, and their concrete implementation as part of everyday operations requires support and articulation both inside and outside liberal adult education institutions. Personnel competence needs to be increased in these areas as well as in more technical matters, such as opening up subcontracting chains.

Based on the survey data, the following development needs emerge:

- **More planning is needed to make sustainability efforts effective.** Liberal adult education institutions are, for the most part, motivated to promote sustainable development and contribute to its implementation. However, respondents are concerned about planned and systematic implementation, as they fear that it will significantly increase workloads. To alleviate this, institutions are in need of concrete, easy-to-apply guidelines for planning and implementing sustainable development. They also want clear methods for monitoring and evaluating sustainable development. The operators of educational institutions play a key role in reinforcing the importance of sustainable development in the institutions' strategies and ensuring sufficient resources not only for implementation, but also for monitoring. A systematic sustainability plan also contributes to good governance.
- **Communicating about sustainable development activities both internally and externally adds value to liberal adult education institutions.** In many institutions, sustainable development is seen as a self-evident value and concrete measure. However, students or partners are not always aware of it. Explaining and communicating about values and practices strengthens the identity of and adds value to the institution and can also improve the institution's standing in communities, improve efficiency and even provide significant cost savings.
- **Financial sustainability also strengthens overall sustainability.** Some liberal adult education institutions have been significantly affected by recent funding cuts. The survey also asked about institutions' views on sustainability from the perspective of sales, economic value, competitiveness and audience growth. The respondents did not view these as significant aspects of economic sustainability. However, by adding a sustainable development dimension to them, such as sustainable consumption and recycling, risk management and innovation, institutions can improve both their own financial sustainability and support students' ability to act more

sustainably. For example, the survey found that less than a quarter of institutions (23.2%) offered education to strengthen financial skills.

- **Liberal adult education institutions have a role to play in combating climate change.** The survey responses provide a somewhat narrow view of environmental sustainability. Almost all of the institutions mention waste recycling as one of their concrete measures, but environmental sustainability is also much more than that. Strengthening the environmental dimension as part of a holistic and measurable plan supports institutions' efforts to adapt to climate change. Liberal adult education institutions reach a wide range of population groups and have the potential to extensively influence efforts to increase nature and carbon handprints through learning.
- **Strengthening cooperation and building networks increase resilience in the changing operating environment.** Many liberal adult education institutions already engage in close cooperation with other actors, but the survey also shows that there is still plenty of room for improvement. Expanding cooperation with other actors in society, such as companies, non-governmental organisations and researchers, can generate new innovations, improve efficiency, support local development and help achieve greater impact.
- **The central government must invest financially in accelerating sustainable development.** Liberal adult education institutions would like the government to increasingly steer them to pursue sustainable development goals and cooperation through funding and project work. The survey respondents would like additional funding for all types of liberal adult education institutions to implement projects, develop sustainable development approaches and strengthen personnel competence. They also want clear methods for monitoring and evaluating sustainable development.
- **Support is needed to facilitate cooperation.** Liberal adult education institutions would like the central government to provide them with support for increasing cooperation between institutions, especially at the regional and national level, but also internationally. They would also like discussion forums to provide up-to-date information and research to support teaching, good practices, new innovations and networking.
- **Increasing systematic advocacy for liberal adult education is, to the greatest extent, a question of sustainability.** The survey respondents want the whole sector to work together to advocate for liberal adult education. The liberal adult education sector plays an important role in lifelong learning throughout Finland. In addition to advocacy, the survey respondents want to see more efforts to increase the visibility of liberal adult education through communication and events.
- **Cooperation and mutual learning between different actors in the field of liberal adult education is considered important.** The survey respondents would like to see more projects and learning environments for sharing good practices and developing sustainable development activities together. In particular, the survey respondents want peer support and joint training that would help integrate sustainable practices into everyday operations.

SOURCES

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- [Liberal adult education - Learning opportunities and students - time series.xlsb](#) (in Finnish)
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- [Viisas liikkuminen \('Sustainable mobility'\) - HSY Ilmastoinfo](#) (in Finnish)

APPENDIX

Current state of sustainable development in liberal adult education institutions

The purpose of this survey is to examine the current activities of Finnish liberal adult education institutions as implementers of sustainable development, collect inspiring examples, identify areas for development and make recommendations for strengthening sustainable development.

In cases where the institution operator is authorised to operate multiple liberal adult education institutions, we would like the operator to submit a separate response for each institution. The survey should take approximately 20–30 minutes to complete. Thank you in advance for your response!

The survey is being carried out by Finnsus Oy. The person responsible for the survey is Rilli Lappalainen (rilli.lappalainen@finnsus.fi, tel. +358 505613456), who can be contacted for further information.

The definition of sustainable development in this context:

Sustainable development means development that ensures good living conditions for present and future generations. The UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to eradicate extreme poverty and achieve sustainable development that takes equal account of the environment, the economy and people. The guiding principle of the programme is that no one is left behind.

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Its basic elements are ecological, economic, social and cultural sustainability. The purpose of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda is to help people learn how to live in harmony with nature and with each other.

An integral part of sustainable development is the notion that the Earth has limits. Human activity must be adapted to the natural resources available on Earth and the carrying capacity of the environment.

This survey examines sustainable development from the perspective of liberal adult education institutions. The terms responsibility, sustainability, sustainable action or sustainable future used by institutions are understood in this survey to mean the same thing as sustainable development.

Background information

Respondent's name * _____

Job title * _____

Email * _____

Name of the institution * _____

Who else took part in responding to the survey? Please provide the names and job titles of everyone who took part

Type of institution *

- ☐ Adult education centre
- ☐ Folk high school
- ☐ Summer university
- ☐ Sports institute
- ☐ Study centre

Please describe sustainable development in your institution in 1–3 words. *

Has your institution adopted a systematic approach to promoting sustainable development? *

- ☐ Yes, we have a separate sustainable development plan.
- ☐ Yes, we have a sustainable development plan as part of some other plan.
- ☐ Yes, but we do not have a separate plan.
- ☐ No. Why not?

If your institution has a sustainable development plan, which of the following options best describes your institution's sustainable development planning?

- ☐ The institution has a plan that was drawn up in collaboration with its staff and students or their representatives.
- ☐ The institution has a plan, but it was not drawn up in collaboration with staff.
- ☐ The institution has a plan, but it was not drawn up in collaboration with students.
- ☐ The institution follows a plan drawn up by the organisation responsible for operating the institution.
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

Does your institution have a designated person responsible for sustainable development matters? *

- ☐ Yes. The person responsible is: (Provide only the person's job title, not their name.)

- ☐ No

Who is implementing sustainable development in practice in your institution? *

- ☐ All staff
- ☐ Only certain people. Who? (Provide only job titles.)

- ☐ No one

Sustainable development in the institution's operations

How is sustainable development reflected in your operations? You can select multiple options. *

- ☐ We implement sustainable development holistically throughout our operations.
- ☐ We implement sustainable development in some of our operations. Please describe in more detail in which operations:

-
- ☐ We comply with norms, standards and legislation.
 - ☐ Sustainable development is not relevant to our operations.

What benefits does your institution seek to achieve through sustainable development measures? You can select multiple options. *

- ☐ Strengthening values
- ☐ Increasing customer satisfaction
- ☐ Building brand value and reputation
- ☐ Innovations
- ☐ Strengthening citizens' basic skills
- ☐ Expanding sustainable development to new target groups
- ☐ Improving competitiveness
- ☐ Strengthening experiential engagement and relevance
- ☐ Expanding the range of education and services
- ☐ Improving the content and quality of education
- ☐ Reducing costs
- ☐ Providing high-quality education
- ☐ Reaching broad target groups
- ☐ Realising the institution's mission and/or vision
- ☐ Increasing sales
- ☐ Increasing fairness
- ☐ Increasing student numbers
- ☐ Increasing inclusion
- ☐ Building a better world
- ☐ Risk management
- ☐ Strengthening stakeholder trust
- ☐ Increasing economic value
- ☐ Increasing equality
- ☐ Ensuring future operations
- ☐ Developing operations and processes
- ☐ Attracting employees
- ☐ Increasing job satisfaction
- ☐ Creating new partnerships
- ☐ Increasing non-discrimination

What sustainability measures have been implemented in your institution from an environmental perspective? You can select multiple options. *

- ☐ Reducing energy consumption
- ☐ Improving energy efficiency
- ☐ Replacing or phasing out fossil fuels in favour of renewable energy sources
- ☐ Determining carbon or environmental footprint *)
- ☐ Determining carbon or environmental handprint **)
- ☐ Adapting to the impacts of climate change
- ☐ Investing in cleaner solutions
- ☐ Waste sorting
- ☐ Offering vegetarian foods
- ☐ Product or service innovations that promote sustainable development
- ☐ Repair construction
- ☐ Determining nature footprint ***)
- ☐ Offering local foods
- ☐ Reducing material or water consumption
- ☐ Carbon offsetting
- ☐ Carrying out an emissions calculation
- ☐ Reducing food waste
- ☐ New construction
- ☐ Promoting sustainable mobility ****)
- ☐ Participating in or organising public debates
- ☐ Eliminating environmental nuisances (such as invasive species)
- ☐ Applying for environmental certification
- ☐ Raising environmental awareness
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

*) A carbon footprint measures the greenhouse gas emissions generated during the life cycle of a product or activity.

**) A carbon handprint describes the positive climate impacts that can be achieved by replacing an old product or service with a new one, for example.

***) A nature footprint describes the impact of human activities on biodiversity and especially the loss thereof.

****) Sustainable mobility means modes of transport that are environmentally and socially sustainable, economical, convenient and safe and promote the health and wellbeing of the people using them. The preferred choices are walking, cycling and public transport. Where using a car is necessary, car sharing, carpooling, park-and-ride, low-emission cars and economical driving should be encouraged. Sustainable mobility also includes reducing the need to travel through remote working, teleconferencing and e-services.

What sustainability measures have been implemented in your institution from a social perspective?

You can select multiple options. *

- ☐ Ensuring customer privacy
- ☐ Reducing inequality in education
- ☐ Supporting staff diversity
- ☐ Human rights risk analysis and due diligence
- ☐ Preventing bullying
- ☐ Training and support to improve employees' skills
- ☐ Preventing child and forced labour
- ☐ Strengthening perceived meaningfulness
- ☐ Supporting student diversity
- ☐ Reducing social and/or regional disparities among students
- ☐ Improving the pleasantness of the institution environment
- ☐ Supporting local communities
- ☐ Promoting the participation of local communities
- ☐ Increasing accessibility
- ☐ Improving social cohesion
- ☐ Increasing gender equality
- ☐ Preventing social exclusion
- ☐ Improving staff wellbeing, health and safety
- ☐ Recruiting new employees to advance sustainable development
- ☐ Promoting non-discrimination and equal opportunities
- ☐ Improving community health, safety and wellbeing
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

What sustainability measures have been implemented in your institution from a cultural perspective? You can select multiple options. *

- ☐ Strengthening citizens' basic skills
- ☐ Strengthening sustainable consumption and consumer information
- ☐ Preserving cultural history
- ☐ Preserving cultural traditions
- ☐ Promoting cultural accessibility
- ☐ Promoting multiculturalism
- ☐ Local immigrant integration
- ☐ Promoting education and culture
- ☐ Promoting tolerance
- ☐ Promoting the arts
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

What sustainability measures have been implemented in your institution from an administrative and economic perspective? You can select multiple options. *

- ☐ Auditing subcontracting and/or supply chains
- ☐ Applying for project funding
- ☐ Strengthening staff's economic skills
- ☐ Principles of good governance
- ☐ Applying sustainability criteria in purchasing and procurement decisions
- ☐ Transport optimisation
- ☐ Repair and maintenance of buildings
- ☐ Providing education to strengthen financial skills
- ☐ Reusing goods
- ☐ Renting and lending goods
- ☐ Shared use of goods
- ☐ Increasing the utilisation rate and multipurpose use of premises
- ☐ Strengthening responsible management
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

How is sustainable development reflected in curricula and education content? You can select multiple options. *

- ☐ We have a separate sustainable development curriculum.
- ☐ Sustainable development is integrated into our curriculum.
- ☐ We offer separate sustainable development studies or courses.
- ☐ We have integrated sustainable development into other learning or course activities.
- ☐ Sustainable development is not reflected in our curriculum.
- ☐ Sustainable development is not reflected in our range of studies or courses.
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

Please describe how the education provided by your institution directly or indirectly develops the sustainable development competence of students.

Reporting and monitoring

How and to whom do you report on your sustainable development efforts? *

How often is the effectiveness of your sustainable development plans evaluated?

Which sustainable development frameworks and standards are your institution's operations influenced by? You can select multiple options.

- ☐ The 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- ☐ EcoCompass
- ☐ Green Key
- ☐ ISO standards
- ☐ OKKA Foundation certificate
- ☐ Sustainable Travel Finland label
- ☐ Eco-Schools
- ☐ Eco-labels (Vastuullinen kuluttaminen: Ympäristö- ja energiamerkit | Kuluttajaliitto) *)
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

*) Vastuullinen kuluttaminen: Ympäristö- ja energiamerkit
(‘Responsible consumption: Environmental and energy labels’),
Consumers’ Union of Finland: <https://www.kuluttajaliitto.fi/materiaalit/vastuullinen-kuluttaminen-ymparisto-ja-energiamerkit/> (in Finnish)

How do you make your sustainable development measures visible?

1. Within the institution to staff:

2. Within the institution to students:

3. To customers:

4. In student recruitment:

5. To the board or equivalent body of the organisation responsible for operating the institution:

6. By engaging with the surrounding society:

7. To partners:

Cooperation and adaptation to changes in the operating environment

Which parties does your institution engage in cooperation with in the area of sustainable development?

What kind of cooperation would you like to see in the future to promote sustainable development?

How have you adapted your sustainable development activities in response to changes in the operating environment (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, government funding cuts)?

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	1 completely disagree	2 somewhat disagree	3 neither agree nor disagree	4 somewhat agree	5 completely agree
In our institution, sustainable development is part of the guidelines and steering of our core operations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Our institution provides staff with opportunities to develop their competence in sustainability work or planning.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

What kind of induction or guidance is given to new employees to implement the objectives set out in your institution's sustainability plans?

How has the drawing up of sustainable development plans affected the practices and atmosphere of your institution?

Future prospects

Which of the following subject areas do you expect your institution to increase the focus on by 2030? You can select multiple options. *

- ☐ Supply chain ethics
- ☐ Staff diversity
- ☐ Human rights
- ☐ Climate change
- ☐ Sustainable consumption
- ☐ Circular economy
- ☐ Biodiversity
- ☐ Student diversity
- ☐ Non-discrimination
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

What challenges does your institution face as regards sustainable development? You can select multiple options. *

- ☐ Customer requirements
- ☐ Increasing administrative work
- ☐ Staff competence
- ☐ Sufficiency of human resources
- ☐ Integrating sustainable development into operations in a holistic manner
- ☐ Additional costs
- ☐ Reputational damage
- ☐ Measuring and monitoring
- ☐ Sufficiency of other resources
- ☐ Teaching facilities
- ☐ Sufficiency of funding
- ☐ Stakeholder requirements
- ☐ Other, please specify _____

What kind of support and guidance do you feel that you need to plan and implement sustainable development? *

Please provide some concrete examples of how sustainable development is implemented in your institution. These examples will help us highlight the many ways to implement sustainable development in liberal adult education institutions.

If your institution has a sustainable development plan, please attach it here.

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